

## Can I Build a Deck?

Whenever we get asked the question, “Can I build a deck?” the first question that comes to mind is “How high will it be?” This often determines if the project will require plan review after an intake appointment or qualify for a subject-to-field-inspection permit (STFI — also known as the over-the-counter permit), or whether a permit is not required.

The primary metrics to keep in mind are whether the deck will be above or below eight feet in height and 18 inches above or at grade (ground level).

Decks that will be more than eight feet high and that are on the second story or above will require plan review. Decks that are below eight feet high and that are 18 inches above grade will qualify for an STFI permit.

Applicants also ask, “Can I construct a deck without having a permit?” The answer is yes — as long as the deck is less than 18 inches above grade.

If your project qualifies for plan review or an STFI — based on the height information above — the next questions asked will relate to lot coverage.

For single family homes, DPD staff will ask:

1. Where is the house located?
2. Will the deck extend into the required yards?
3. Does the project exceed lot coverage?

The permit type that your project qualifies for can often be determined by knowing the zone of your property. To find your zoning, visit the GIS Maps on the DPD website at:

<http://web1.seattle.gov/dpd/dpdgisv2/mapviewer.aspx>.

You can not build a deck above 18 inches that encroaches into the required yards. The required yards consist of the front (20 ft), side (5 ft) and rear yard (25 ft or 20 percent lot depth).

If the planned deck exceeds lot coverage, you will not be able to build the deck or will need to redesign its dimensions to fit in the lot.

If you need further clarification about these lot-coverage questions, read Client Assistance Memo (CAM) 220, *Lot Coverage, Height and Yard Standards for Homes in Single Family Zones*.

We recommend that you read CAM 303A, *Common Seattle Residential Code Requirements*, so you can familiarize yourself with the life-safety requirements for your deck, including guardrails, stairs, etc.

If you need further assistance before starting your project, please visit the ASC and talk with a Permit Specialist.

### Helpful Resources:

1. CAM 220, *Lot Coverage, Height and Yard Standards for Homes in Single Family Zone*
2. CAM 303A, *Common Seattle Residential Code Requirements*
3. CAM 316, *Subject-to-Field Inspection Permits*
4. Subject-to-Field Inspection Permits  
[www.seattle.gov/dpd/Permits/Process\\_Overview/TypesofPermitIntake/STFI\\_Permits/](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Permits/Process_Overview/TypesofPermitIntake/STFI_Permits/)
5. Single Family Residence Additions/Alterations  
[www.seattle.gov/dpd/Publications/Forms/Packets/SingleFamily/default.asp](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Publications/Forms/Packets/SingleFamily/default.asp)

## Deck Permit Chart

Plan Review	Second story deck or above; higher than 8 feet
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Subject-to-Field Inspection (STFI)	8 feet or lower; higher than 18 inches above grade
No Permit Needed	18 inches or less above grade

## What Is a Site Plan and When Is It Required?

A site plan is an accurate drawing or map of a piece of property showing its size and shape. It also shows the size, shape and location of any man-made and natural features (such as buildings, structures, driveways and trees) on the property.

Site plans show what currently exists on the site, and what physical changes you wish to make that will change conditions on the site.

If you are adding on to your existing home, you are required to have a basic site plan. More complex projects such as construction of a new single family home, multifamily or commercial development will require more detailed information and a different type of site plan.

The best way of finding out the type of site plan needed for your project, is to read Client Assistance Memo (CAM) 103, *Site Plan Requirements*. Another great resource to help prepare your site plan is CAM 103A, *Site Plan Guidelines*.

Site plans can be one of the most difficult projects for a homeowner because all plans need to be accurate and to scale. We recommend reading through CAM 106, *General Standards for Plans and Drawings*.

One of the main problems customers usually run into is the measurement of their property line. Fences are notoriously incorrect for the property line. Sidewalks are also not a clear indicator where the property line begins.

If there is a sidewalk in front of the house you will need a base map.

The Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) engineering records vault on the 47th floor of the Seattle Municipal Tower (700 5th Avenue) will let you know the measurements from the sidewalk to the property line. For more information, visit:

**[www.seattle.gov/util/Engineering/Records\\_Vault/Hours\\_&\\_Location](http://www.seattle.gov/util/Engineering/Records_Vault/Hours_&_Location)**.

Customers tend to also struggle with lot coverage calculations. When this happens, we have them reference CAM 220, *Lot Coverage, Height and Yard Standards for Single Family Homes*. This CAM also shows that the customer must have accurate required yard standard information for the front, side and rear yard (the required yards and structure dimensions must equal the lots overall depth and width; see the example illustration on page 4).

If the site is in an environmentally critical area (ECA), you should read through CAM 103B, *Environmentally Critical Area Site Plan Requirements*.

We highly recommended contacting a design professional if your site exists in an ECA. This could save you lots of time and money in the long run.

To find out if your project exists in an ECA, visit the DPD GIS Map tool

(<http://web1.seattle.gov/dpd/maps/dpdgis.aspx>), meet with a Permit Specialist in the ASC.

If you plan to draw up the site plan yourself, here are some suggestions:

- Read the CAMs mentioned above and the single family checklist and standards ([www.seattle.gov/dpd/Publications/Forms/Packets/SingleFamily](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Publications/Forms/Packets/SingleFamily))
- If there have been recent permits for your property, pick up a copy of your site plan from DPD's microfilm in the Applicant Services Center and redraw the site based on dimensions using scales and paper types as described in CAM 106, *General Standards for Plans and Drawings*.
- Visit the King County Assessor's Office and obtain a survey, if one is available for your site.

If you have questions about what you can build on your site, we suggest drawing up a preliminary site plan that shows existing and proposed conditions, and then meet with a permit specialist in the ASC.

A preliminary site plan contains enough information to assist DPD staff in understanding the scope of your project. DPD staff can assist you in identifying codes, requirements and processes that could impact your project.

## Can I Build an Accessory Structure on My Property?

Whenever we get asked the question, “Can I build an accessory structure on my property?” the first question that comes to mind is, “How big will it be?” If the structure does not exceed 120 square feet—measured from the projected roof area (eaves are included)—and is not constructed on a permanent foundation other than slab on grade, you will not need a building permit (per SRC 105.2.3). However, you do need to comply with land use code requirements (SMC 23.44).

But often, the proposed structure will be larger than 120 square feet. In each case, the first thing we look at is the zone and the lot size of the property.

A good way to find the zone of your property is to visit the DPD GIS map tool:

**<http://web1.seattle.gov/dpd/maps/dpdgis.aspx>**. If you’re in a zone other than single family, you need to come into the ASC and meet with a land use planner.

The next thing to look at is your lot coverage. You can read more about lot coverage in Client Assistance Memo (CAM) 220, *Lot Coverage, Height and Yard Standards for Homes in Single Family Zones*. You can also find more information on lot coverage by reviewing your parcel information on the DPD Seattle Parcel Data tool:

**<http://web1.seattle.gov/dpd/dpdgisv2/parceldatasearch.aspx>**.

By looking at the DPD GIS map and Seattle Parcel Data tools, we can see existing structures. Structures that are 18 inches or lower are not included in lot coverage calculations. If your project is on a corner lot or alley, additional provisions may be considered.

Homes (principal structures) and accessory structures may cover 35 percent of the lot size or 1,750 square feet (whichever is more). The lot coverage in a required rear yard is no more than 40 percent.

The next thing to consider is where you want the structure and where you are allowed to build it. To build an accessory structure, a primary use (as evidenced by a principal structure) must have been established on the property.

A detached accessory structure—an accessory structure that is more than five feet eave-to-eave from the principal structure (Director’s Rule 10-95, *Attached vs. Detached as Applied to Accessory Structures and Accessory Uses*)—can be on the property line in the required rear yard. Certain access requirements may require the accessory structure to be 12 feet from the center of the alley for garages. There are also provisions where the detached accessory structure can be located in the side yard.

If you plan to build anything in an environmentally critical area (ECA), please visit the ASC and talk with a permit specialist.

To find more information on where you can build your accessory structure, we often refer an applicant to the chart on page six of CAM 220.

Customers then ask the question, “How high can I build the accessory structure?” If you’re in a required yard—depending on the type of yard—an accessory structure (studio or shed) other than a garage can be a maximum of 12 feet in height. For a garage, the top of the wall can be a maximum of 12 feet in height, but the ridge (incline) can receive a 3:12 ratio up to 15 feet.

If the accessory structure is being built in the principal building area (out of the required yards), the structure can be as high as the principal structure—dependent on where the lot is located.

For instance if the principal structure is 30 feet, and you’re building the accessory structure within the principal building area, you can build the accessory structure up to 30 feet (same height as the principal structure). You are also allowed a five-foot pitched roof bonus.

## Do I Need a Permit to Build a Fence?

We often get asked the question, I want to build a fence; do I need a permit? There are two steps you need to take before starting your fence project. First, you need to make sure your desired fence location is on your property. This may seem an obvious step, but it is easy to confuse the location of property lines. Second, you need to factor in the height of the fence.

Fences do not count toward lot coverage and are allowed anywhere on the property. To find your property lines, do not rely on the location of the current fence. We recommend you get your property surveyed or visit the Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) Engineering Records Vault on the 47th floor of the Seattle Municipal Tower (700 5th Avenue). SPU will

provide a base map that will help you locate your property line so the fence is not accidentally built in the public right-of-way. For more information, visit [www.seattle.gov/util/Engineering/Records\\_Vault/index.asp](http://www.seattle.gov/util/Engineering/Records_Vault/index.asp).

Fences can be built up to six feet high. Trellises and similar features may be up to eight feet high, but must be predominantly open. See the example in Client Assistance Memo 312, *Decks, Fences and Arbors for Single Family Homes in Seattle*. No portion of the fence can be over eight feet high (per SMC 23.44.014.D.10).

**A fence that does not exceed eight feet in height and does not have masonry or concrete elements above six feet in height, is exempt from a building permit—provided it meets development standards (per SRC R105.24).**

If the fence is on top of a retaining wall it can be no higher than 9.5 feet from the grade at the bottom of the retaining wall. But if you move the fence back 3.5 feet from the edge of the retaining wall, you will have to follow the standard height restrictions listed above.

Either side of the fence may face your property.

If your property is in an environmentally critical area or on a sloped lot, or if you're planning on building a masonry, brick or rock-wall fence, we recommend coming into the ASC and talking with a land use planner. Every project is site specific; in some cases constructing these types of fences leads to soil disturbance, which could trigger additional reviews.

When building a fence, you should be aware of the design guidelines or covenants of your neighborhood. To learn more about neighborhood-specific design guidelines, visit [www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Design\\_Review\\_Program/Applicant\\_s\\_Toolbox/Design\\_Guidelines/default.asp](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Design_Review_Program/Applicant_s_Toolbox/Design_Guidelines/default.asp).

Bulkheads and retaining walls have more stringent design standards, so if you are considering that type of project, come into the ASC and talk with a permit specialist.

## Where Can I Find the General Standards for Project Plans?

Project plans reflect what is happening on the site, including a schematic of site activities and the scope of the project. Plans verify that the proposed project complies with all technical codes; allowing DPD to see “what you’re doing, where you’re doing it, and how you’re doing it.”

Most projects require plans, unless you are advised otherwise in a coaching session.

It is very important to read Client Assistance Memo (CAM) 106, *General Standards for Plans and Drawings*, ([www.seattle.gov/dpd/publications/cam/cam106.pdf](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/publications/cam/cam106.pdf)) before submitting your plans to the Applicant Services Center (ASC). If you do not follow the standards outlined in CAM 106 you may not be able to submit your application. Common problems include using the wrong type or size of paper, not following the plan scale, submitting below-quality plans, or not submitting the proper number of copies.

Plans submitted to DPD serve as documentation of what was approved in the DPD office and what inspectors will look for in the field.

Submitted plans will eventually be microfilmed and re-sized to an 11- by 17-inch document. We microfilm all plans to show the site's history of activity, permits issued, and established uses. This process provides an archive of the project.

For more information, please be sure to read CAM 106, *General Standards for Plans and Drawings*. For more examples of various plans, please read CAM 303, *Applicant Responsibilities and Plan Requirements for Single Family and Two-Unit Dwellings* ([www.seattle.gov/dpd/publications/cam/cam303.pdf](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/publications/cam/cam303.pdf)).